

To the Eighteen-Year-Old Track Star

sitting in the front row of my writing class,
doodling an anime girl on white computer paper
while I explain the anonymous saying
Reality was truth once, why aren't you listening?
You are sniffing instead of blowing your nose, you
are looking deep into lead irises, your head cocked sideways.
I ask, *Carrie, what does the chapter say about rhetoric?*
You fumble through your bag for handouts: *I remember.*
I just. I can't. You are saved by some boy sitting in the back.
Carrie, I want you to stop drawing. I want you to sit up straight,
keep your ponytail from tickling your cheekbone. I want you to think
about what it means to be a girl who can say anything, who
can run for the pleasure of experiencing her body. Carrie,
do you know that one day a young Somali girl reported her rape
only to be accused of adultery? She was buried up to her neck, stoned
to death. Carrie, has anyone ever thrown a rock at you? Have you ever
looked into the eyes of the dying? Have you ever been terrified?
Damn it, Carrie. Put that pencil down. Cup your chin into your hands. Look up.